

A Letter From China

Tsinan, Shantung, China.

January 30th, 1911.

"The Chinese New Year"

Out Dear Home Folks:

For six days now we have had snow. To-day the ground is all white with over a foot of fine dry snow. This is the Chinese New Year and all of the Chinese go to call on their friends and say, "You have passed over the year well." This means of course that the people are so poor that it shows itself even in their greetings to each other on the most joyful feast of the year. Every one in China has a birthday To-day. The little children in arms are one year old to-day. The snow is so deep that the people who live on the streets could not come to call. They will come the first pretty day. All the servants and people who live around our compound made the rounds calling. Mr. Murray, Mr. Johnston, and Mr. Torrance, received some of the callers in our study. Mrs. Hamilton, Mrs. Johnston, and I received women at Mrs. Hamilton's. We served tea and little Chinese cakes. We gave the children a few coppers. Mrs. Johnston had some small sea shells which she gave the children. They were very happy over the shells. I have a large screen which is covered with blue cloth. I let a poor woman pin about a hundred post cards with interesting pictures of streets, buildings, trees, flowers, children, animals, etc., on the screen. The woman were wild with delight to see and talk about so many interesting things. It was not hard to entertain them. I could talk about the pictures a little.

You may have already heard thru the papers of the plague that is now raging in Manchuria and in the region just north of us. The officials of our town are taking measures to prevent its coming to our city. They have put a line of soldiers along the Yellow River at our north, all trains from the north have stopped, an order for rat killing has gone forth, they have isolation wards already for the first suspicious case or cases. Our Dr. Neal is ready to go at the first call. He has long robes that can be dipped in an antiseptic and he will go to make the examination in that wet garment. Of course it will freeze on him such weather as this. The measures that are being taken by the officials here are in advance of anything they have ever done before and we are praying that our city may escape the plague. Our physicians were offered money by the officials but they asked that the money be put into the isolation wards, etc. This snow may have been sent to stay the plague. The Chinese cannot travel in the snow and the rats will not travel so well either. In this way some time will be gained. This snow is a better quarantine than the combined armies of the orient could effect.

Some of you have been asking for first impressions of China. Here are a few things I jotted down while in Shanghai.

We were told that on Saturday

morning we should be in China. All day Friday we felt an unrest that had been gradually increasing since passing Yokohama. Late in the afternoon there was a change in the color of the water that told us plainly that we were nearing land, it was the yellow waters of the Yang-tee Kiang River. At 9 o'clock we dropped anchor in the mouth of the great river. After a quiet and restful night we were awakened by the hurry and stir of passengers and crew; for a great many of the passengers were leaving the steamer at Shanghai. The inspection officers came aboard and examined all the steerage, second class, and lastly the first class passengers. A beautiful steam tender came out to our steamer to meet us and take us up the river to Shanghai. We said our final farewells to the kind and congenial Captain and other officers. We went on board the tender with all our luggage and as we pulled away up the river leaving our steamer lying there with the stars and stripes furled and the flag of Japan flying because she had just come from Japan we knew that she had just come from America and it was not till then that we said farewell to dear old America. It is a beautiful two hour ride up the river to Shanghai. As we approached we saw signals of different kinds. One is an arrangement of balls which are raised and lowered on wires. I heard some one say that they use the Morse system. The approach of a vessel is told by the signals. We saw Chinese junk and house boats. A Japanese war ship lay at anchor in the harbor. Hurrah, There is a U. S. A. flag. What is it? Oh a gun boat. A pretty white one with the eagle flying on head. Do you think we are glad to see "Old Glory"? Now as we pass on we see many other ships of many lands. We are approaching the great Shanghai bund (water front). Such scrambling for baggage every one finds his own and holds on. Now the tender is still, the rush has begun. I will stay by the luggage while the others go to see if there is any one here to meet us. Yes here is a Chinese boy with a brass tag marked "Missionary Home" That is where we expect to stop while in Shanghai. This boy cannot speak English and we cannot speak Chinese. The boy understands that we are the people whom he has come to meet and begins getting our luggage together. Here comes man in a purple garment (we dubbed him "Purple Robe") Who explains in broken English that he is the boss of this boy, he knows all about us and will get us and our things to the Missionary Home. The boy after some attempts to make an explanation allows him to order the barrows. Our trunks are all securely strapped to four wheel barrows. Here is some one looking for Miss Judson. Yes she is in our company. It is a note from Mr. Evans of the Missionary Home saying that the bearer is his trusted servant and will see that all her party and their luggage are cared for. This servant speaks beautiful English and we tell him about the man of the purple robe and the boy with the badge. You should see his anger. He tells the man to behave himself. He also gives him

some advice in his native tongue. The boy with the badge is in evidence now and is identified as belonging to the Missionary Home. Now we are in risk-haws and with the big trusted servants at the head we are rattling thru the streets of Shanghai.

The Missionary Home is really a private home where missionaries stop to wait for steamers in going to or from home. It is a great thing that there is such a place. We are all very tired and do not care to do much sightseeing to-day. As soon as tiffin is over we go with Miss Abernathy to call on some missionaries of the Methodist mission. These ladies say they will take us into the old "native city." Now we begin to see China. Masses of men women and children with coarse blue cotton clothing. The men bare to the waist pushing great wheelbarrow loads, the sweat running off their backs and faces like rain. Women with only stumps for feet carrying children or heavy baskets of food or findings. Every one on every side working, working, working--at the hardest kind labor. By the road-side men, women, and children are busy sorting old rags they have gathered up. You see tiny children going about with a basket to gather up the smallest scraps to add to their parents gleanings.

Here at the canal we see women washing their clothes, vegetables, and any thing else they wish to have clean. In this place you may see cotton being carded. The man has something which looks like a bow and arrow. The bow string rests on the cotton. He strikes the string in some way to set it vibrating the string catches the cotton and tears it apart leaving it fluffy and soft. Here are pewter things for sale. You can get very pretty pewter tea pots. This is a copper shop. That man is making a big ladle now. If you give him something to go by he will copy it pretty well in copper.

Look at those pretty reed chairs. Yes the Chinese make very good chairs. Here are baskets too of almost every shape. This one with a lid and handle like a lunch basket is a tea cosy. You put your tea pot in there and carry it with you. It will keep warm long time. It is the Chinese "thermos" bottle. We will stop at this money shop. We have some Chinese money but the street car will take only certain kinds of coppers. They will exchange with you for silver money of any country but will not take brass copper or nickel.

You can buy a kettle of hot water, or tea at this food shop. Boiling soup is always on hand. Boiled sweet potatoes, steamed rolls of maize or millet, fried cakes, dried persimmons and a great variety of water vegetables. Oh, let us stop at this china shop. What are these things which look like a slop jar? Those are garden seats. They are about the size and shape of a nail keg, only they are made of heavy ironstone china.

There are lots of bowls, teapots, and queer looking dishes for the Chinese food put together like a steam cooker to keep warm.

Is this a jewelry store? All the shops are so small. Just large enough to hold the goods when packed in at night, with a place for the shop keeper to wrap up in his cotton quilt, and lie down to sleep. In the day he spreads his wares on a little counter which juts out into the street, and the customer stands here to look at the goods for sale. Is this real jade here in this little dirty shop? Yes, it is real jade. It can be purchased at many of these little shops. See the funny wooden combs. And the hair ornaments, they are very cheap and showy. Here are rings, earrings and necklaces made of very cheap material but bright and shiny like the prizes which come in pop-corn boxes. These little carved ivory things are certainly attractive. The Chinese are wonderfully skilled in carving. We must hurry on, see this, a wood carver's shop. Trays, jars, tables, chairs and I do not know what all carved with tiny figures of men, animals, dragons trees and flowers.

Here is an undertaker shop, no, it is a coffin makers shop. Out here in the street are two men sawing a big log into two. One end of the log is propped up, one man stands on the log with one end of the saw in his hand, the other man is on the ground with the other end of the saw. They rip great logs open in this way. The saw is very much like our cross-cut saws. The coffins are made of very heavy pieces of wood four to six inches thick, the thicker the better. Here are birds and other live things to sell. What are in those tiny cages about 1-2" square? They are crickets. What are they for? Oh, the Chinese are very musical, they like to hear the crickets sing. A Chinaman will carry his pet cricket in his bosom all winter to keep it from freezing. Oh, a fruit shop. This looks like a tomato only it is the color of an orange. What can they be? Persimmons, Chinese Persimmons. They are delicious, when they are fresh and the dried ones are nicer than dates. Here are pears, grapes and peaches. These bright red things that look like crab apples are a kind of crab apple, they are very acid and make splendid jelly. When made into jam they are very much like our cranberries. We may stop a moment at this shoe shop. See the beautiful little embroidered shoes with the pointed toes. They tell a story too real to put on paper. All the shoes are cloth. The sole is very thick, made of layer upon layer of tiny scraps of cloth or paper. The winter shoes are padded with cotton or lined with fur.

Now we enter a long winding street which leads to the temple by such queer turns that no devil may find the way and be able to do much mischief after so tedious a journey. On every side sit the beggars. Little children, men and women, old and young, with all kinds of sores and disease, and filth. They beset you on all sides kneeling to you and saying, "Do a good deed, do a good deed" "Share another's woe, share another's woe." We go on past public cess pools, past dirt and smells that one can not describe or imagine but can never forget, on to the tea house

which is in the center of the lake or most. The tea house at this hour (4 o'clock) is filled with men who are drinking and smoking. We go on into the temple. We can hardly pass for the beggars, but having been warned that the beggars are an organized guild who can push through with better heart. It is awful to think of them spending their lives lying on the streets begging. Some women with tiny babes in their bosoms. A cloud of smoke met us at the temple door, the smoke of burning incense. As we enter a priest smiles and bows. He explains (one of the missionaries who understands the language interpreting) that this is the temple of life. A god for each year of a mans life is here. We begin at the god of birth and look at each of these little dirty ugly images. The priest then shows us the big bunches of gilt paper hanging from the ceiling. It is money which has been offered to the gods. Now we go into the oldest part of the temple. The dust on the walls and gods in here look like it had been at rest since the deluge. See festoons of dust and cob-webs decorate the ceiling so by the aid of a little smoke you cannot even see the ceiling. Here come three girls dressed in white, they are in deep mourning. Their grandfather is dead and they have come to honor his memory by prayer and offering to the gods. They bow to an image then fall on their faces before it. Then go in to an inner court and pay some money, immediately there is a deafening sound, the beating of drums, the sound of cymbals and bells to waken the gods and let them know some one has paid money and has a petition. The Christian Chinese woman who is with us begins talking with the girls and then to the crowd who have collected around us (foreigners). She invites them to prayer meeting telling them the time and place. Then she tells them how very happy she is and that they can be too if they will only learn the TRUTH. They all smile and bow and we smile and bow and come on, and go back to the Missionary Home through the same streets or others like them and are silent at the great toiling, toiling, toiling mass of humanity that we have seen in all the streets of SHANGHAI. They must toil or perish physically, they are so very poor. The whole thing takes hold of you in a way you never knew before. The need is far greater than we imagined. Can one forget the sight of the great toiling mass in Shanghai, and to think of the great empire like this. We have seen the vision and it is now impossible to turn back. This is a great needy people and they do not know it, but we have seen it only a little, one's heart would burst if he saw it all at once. No wonder the Savior's great heart broke on Calvary with this world's vision before him.

Feb. 2, 1911. The signs point to six weeks more bad weather but I guess some signs fail in Shantung. The snow lies on the ground about 10 inches thick. A little melted or evaporated yesterday and to-day. We have been out having a frolic